

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A gas spring assembly for permanent installation in a vehicle in advance of a painting process to which the vehicle is subjected, comprising:
  - a gas spring comprising a cylinder having a closed end and an open end, a piston rod telescopingly received at one end within the open end of the cylinder and having a free end outside of the cylinder, and an end fitting mounted on each of the closed end of the cylinder and the free end of the piston rod; and
  - a removable protective sleeve enclosing the gas spring in its entirety, including the end fittings, and being closed at both ends thereof, said protective sleeve comprising a flexible, liquid spray-impermeable material capable of extending and contracting with telescopic movement of the piston rod relative to the cylinder and of being substantially stripped from the gas spring following the completion of the painting process, leaving the gas spring as a permanent component of the vehicle.
2. The gas spring assembly of claim 1, wherein the liquid spray-impermeable material is a polypropylene.
3. The gas spring assembly of claim 1 wherein the liquid spray-impermeable material is a polyamide.
4. The gas spring assembly of claim 1 wherein the protective sleeve is closed with at least one of a twist tie, clip, or heat seal.
5. A method for permanently installing a gas spring in a vehicle in advance of a painting process to which the vehicle is subject, comprising the steps:
  - receiving a gas spring, wherein the gas spring comprises a cylinder having a closed end and an open end, a piston rod telescopingly received at one end within the open end of the cylinder and having a free end outside of the cylinder, and end fittings mounted on each of the closed end of the cylinder and the free end of the piston rod;
  - enclosing the gas spring in its entirety with a removable protective sleeve, including the end fittings, said protective sleeve comprising a flexible, liquid spray-impermeable material capable of extending and contracting with telescopic movement of the piston rod relative to the cylinder;
  - installing the gas spring enclosed in the removable protective sleeve in the vehicle; and

stripping all visible portions of the removable protective sleeve from the gas spring following the completion of the painting process, leaving the gas spring as a permanent component of the vehicle.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the liquid spray-impermeable material is a polypropylene.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the liquid spray-impermeable material is a polyamide.

8. The method of claim 5 wherein the protective sleeve is closed with at least one of a twist tie, clip, or heat seal.